

ASHA VAHISHTA THE ULTIMATE TRUTH KNOWLEDGE

Truly the knowledge derived
By the good mind
Never before known
Among the wise and in the universe
With it make good rules and never waning
Increasing righteousness
Leading us towards Perfection

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Did the Oracle Inhale?

To the ancient Greeks, the oracle at Delphi was the voice of Apollo. To Jelle de Boer, the oracle was more likely an ordinary woman high on hydrocarbons. De Boer, a geologist at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, believes the medium who served in the shrine delivered her prophecies while immersed in a trance induced by a naturally occurring mixture of ethane, methane, and ethylene, a sweet-smelling gas that was used as an anaesthetic in the early 20th century.

De Boer had discovered that the Temple of Apollo lies atop the crossroads of two geologic faults. The slipping and expansion of these faults, he believes, allowed volatile gases to escape from oil-rich limestone deposits and rise through fissures and springs into the sunken base of the shrine. When de Boer and his colleagues recently analyzed sediments from inside the shrine's foundation, they discovered trapped molecules of ethane and methane. They also found these gases, as well as ethylene, bubbling up in the Kerna Spring, northwest of the temple.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the author and temple priest Plutarch fingered a sweet-smelling gas as the source of the oracle's predictions. But the French archaeologists who excavated the site a century ago dismissed the

theory as myth. De Boer thinks it is time to give Plutarch proper credit: "He was a very good naturalist. He gave what is basically a primitive geological report."

By Josie Glausiusz @ www.discovery.com

Myths and Reality By the Numbers: Don't Blame It on the Moon

Folk wisdom holds that more babies are born during the full moon than at other times. Many doctors and nurses agree. Astronomer Daniel Caton of Appalachian State University wondered if anyone had ever put the claim to a test. After unearthing a few inconclusive studies, he began to hunt around for a data set large enough to yield reliable statistics. He and his students collected data on 70 million births over the past 20 years from the National Center for Health Statistics. Then they painstakingly entered the numbers into a computer to search for patterns. At last, Caton can deliver an unambiguous verdict: The phase of the moon has no influence on the number of babies born. "The full moon is the most obvious moon—it rises at sunset and it's up all night. People remember what they happen to notice," Caton says. Next, he hopes to tackle another bit of lunar folklore, which claims that more crimes and emergency-room admissions occur when the moon is full.

By Solana Pyne@ www.discovery.com

Taken to Heart Brushing your teeth may be good for your ticker

Coronary heart disease, the leading killer in the U.S., is mostly related to smoking, lack of exercise and too many visits to the greasy spoon. But recently infection has joined the list as a possible risk factor. In particular, some studies suggest an association between infected gums and heart disease, and oral bacteria have even shown up in the sticky plaques lining diseased arteries. If a causal relation can be established, then treating gum disease early may prevent hundreds of heart attacks every year. At least half of all Americans over age 30 have gingivitis, a mild inflammation caused by bacterial plaque. Untreated, it may turn

into periodontitis, in which bacteria colonize pockets that form between the gums and teeth. The resulting inflammation slowly eats away tissue and bone, eventually leading to tooth loss. At least one third of U.S. adults over age 30 have some form of periodontitis (smoking is a main risk factor for getting it).

Acute periodontitis may lead to heart disease because it might cause low-level inflammation in the whole body: chemicals produced by the immune reaction in the gum pockets probably spill over into the bloodstream and trigger the liver to make proteins that inflame arterial walls and clot blood. Atherosclerosis and, ultimately, heart attack may result. One such factor, C-reactive protein—a predictor of heart disease—is elevated in patients with periodontitis. Alternatively, the microbes themselves may travel from the mouth and affect blood vessels.

@ www.discovery.com

The Genetic Secrets of Aging

The secret to long life may be written in sequences of DNA that are short and sweet. After combing through genetic samples from hundreds of siblings over age 90, a team of Harvard physicians and molecular biologists say they are almost certain that the best way to ensure an exceptional old age is having the right one or two genes on chromosome 4.

"Most of us have the genetics to get us to our mid-to-late eighties in fine health, but we mess it up by smoking, not exercising, and eating a rotten diet," says aging specialist Tom Perls, who led the research team. "But only one in 10,000 seems to have the ability to reach 100, and they do this despite doing the same things as the rest of us." Moreover, these hardy few seem somehow to sidestep Alzheimer's disease, cancer, heart disease, and strokes.

Brief stretches of matching DNA on the fourth chromosome seem to be the most crucial genetic evidence linking the vigorous elders. Perls thinks the genes code for something that conveys increased resistance to age-related diseases, possibly by scooping up damage-causing free radicals or increasing the rate of DNA repair. Once they nail down the specific sequences, Perls and his colleagues will start looking at the related biochemical pathways and searching for drugs that mimic their effects.

"We ought to be able to find a way to prevent the age-related diseases that kill most of us before our time," Perls says.

By Jocelyn Selim @ www.discovery.com

Stone-Age Social Security

Anthropologist Erik Trinkaus of Washington University in St. Louis has found evidence of kindness among ancient cave dwellers. A fossilized jawbone excavated from a cave in southern France shows that somebody was nursing the old and infirm some 200,000 years ago. The jaw contains the remains of just a few broken roots of teeth and evidence of huge abscesses. Yet this man survived long enough for bone to grow in and refill the sockets, something that could have happened only if he had gotten a little help from his friends. "You never see that sort of thing in nonhuman primates. When a monkey loses its teeth, it dies," says Trinkaus.

The caveman's friends or family would have had to spend a lot of time either pre-chewing food or grinding it with stone tools, says Trinkaus. "Bones found at the site tell us they were eating wild goat and horse on the hoof, which has the consistency of old shoe leather."

By Jocelyn Selim @ www.discovery.com

JOKE

Doctors can be frustrating. You wait a month-and-a-half for an appointment, and he says, "I wish you'd come to me sooner."

You read about all these terrorists, most of them came legally to the US, but they hung around on these expired visas, some for as long as 10-15 years. Now, compare that to Blockbuster video; you are two days late with a video and those people are all over you. They better put Blockbuster in charge of immigration.
